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ABSTRACT

Procedures for establishing a student-run election information and issue analysis center at the high school level are presented. The purpose of the election information center is to provide the student population with an awareness of candidate's views and to coordinate volunteer activities of students in a campaign. Student personnel include a director, three committee chairmen (for contact, coordinating, and communication committees), and committee members. The contact committee compiles a list of candidates and locates groups interested in student volunteers. The coordinating committee matches student volunteers with requests from local political candidates and organizations, and recruits student volunteers. The communication committee compiles candidate information folders and maintains a chart of candidate's positions on major issues. The issue analysis center provides information on the evolution of issues during the course of a campaign. A bulletin board charts potential and established issues and their effect on the campaign. The maintenance of the bulletin board is supplemented by independent study, discussion panels, and student-conducted surveys. Appendices include a candidate questionnaire and election profile form. (KC)

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ELECTION INFORMATION/ ISSUES ANALYSIS CENTER

SO 014 420

Institute for Political/Legal Education

ELECTION INFORMATION CENTER
AND
ISSUE ANALYSIS CENTER

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In 1974, the political education program was validated as successful, cost-effective, and exportable by the standards and guidelines of the United States Office of Education. As a result, the program is now funded through ESEA, Title III as a demonstration site to provide dissemination materials and services to interested educators.

ELECTION INFORMATION CENTER AND ISSUE ANALYSIS CENTER

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ELECTION INFORMATION CENTER
AND
ISSUE ANALYSIS CENTER

INTRODUCTION

Studies have shown that voter apathy and low voter turnout at the polls frequently indicates inadequate voter information on the candidates and issues. When people do not know who the candidates are, what their positions are, and what the major issues are, there is little motivating, or perhaps even sense, in exercising the right to vote.

Consequently, every effort must be made to increase voter education. Students need an opportunity to examine the background and qualifications of candidates in relation to the requirements of each office, to research the issues and to become personally involved, as a volunteer, in a campaign. Such an opportunity will assist students analyze and understand the process by which people are elected to office and political decisions are made. Furthermore, students will be able to differentiate fact from fiction and base their conclusions regarding issues on objective evidence rather than emotional arguments.

As a result of establishing and operating both an Election Information Center and an Issue Analysis Center, students will be better equipped to participate more fully in the electoral process. The methods in setting up the centers are quite similar and this booklet recommends procedures which have proven successful. In fact, the centers might share the same room and students of each center certainly should communicate frequently to avoid duplication of effort

ELECTION INFORMATION CENTER

Purpose

The Election Information Center provides the student population with an awareness of candidates and their views. It also coordinates the volunteer activities of students in a campaign.

Location and Materials

The location of the center is most important. It should be accessible to students. It must be large enough to accommodate a number of students at one time; those working at desks and at the bulletin board, and those seeking information.

Possible locations:

1. school corridor
2. vacant meeting room
3. back of a classroom

Materials:

1. large bulletin board or sign
2. file folders; 50 to 75
3. file boxes
4. tables or desks and chairs for boxes and workers

Personnel

The Election Information Center should be organized and staffed entirely by students.

Personnel needs are: Director of the Center
3 committee chairmen
committee members

Director of the Center

The student selected as Director of the Center should be an effective organizer who works well with people because he must oversee the work of the committees. The person must be a responsible individual, capable of making decisions and implementing them. The Director sees that all material on candidates is accurate and up to date. He also coordinates student volunteers.

COMMITTEES

To carry out the informational function of the Center, students establishing a center should organize three committees:

1. the Contact Committee
2. the Coordinating Committee
3. the Communication Committee

Each committee should select a chairman who will meet individually with the Director, as well as with the other chairmen. Since the chairman of each committee is responsible for the activities of that committee, and will want the highest level of performance from committee members, the chairman should be a student leader capable of motivating other students and working cooperatively with them and the Director. The "core" group of director and committee chairmen will discuss ideas and procedures for the proper functioning of the center and resolve any problems.

CONTACT COMMITTEE

The main task of this committee will be contacting the county clerk's office and local political organizations. From the county clerk's office, students will request information on the candidates for all offices and prepare a list. Be sure to get a COMPLETE list of candidates and include party affiliation. In contacting political candidates and organizations, students will want to learn which groups might like to have high school volunteers during the campaign. Inform the groups that they will be notified by letter at a later date as to whom to contact for the names of volunteers. A list of interested groups should be made up and given to the Coordinating Committee.

Contacts can be made via telephone, mail or in person. In each instance, students should identify themselves, the school and the project.

OPERATING PROCEDURE

FIRST Contact the school office and find out what cities are represented in the school attendance area.

SECOND Contact County Clerk's Office at County seat and request the names, party affiliation and office sought by candidates on the ballot in each ward, in each voting district, within the school attendance area.

THIRD Contact local candidates and political organizations to determine what groups would like student volunteers during the campaign.

FOURTH Compile information into two separate lists.

- Offices and candidates
- Political candidates and organizations interested in student volunteers

Coordinating Committee

The main responsibility of this committee is to coordinate student volunteers with local political candidates and organizations.

After the list of interested political organizations is obtained from the Contact Committee, the chairman of the Coordinating Committee should select one student (taking into account student preference) for each organization to be the liason between the school and the political organization. The student liason will be responsible for contacting the interested organization and explain who he is, where he can be reached, and when he is available to meet and determine the role in the campaign.

Once the center is open, the Coordinating Committee will actively recruit student volunteers. Posters requesting students to sign up should be placed conspicuously around the school. Students interested in volunteering should register at the center. Forms for that purpose should be printed. If a student has a preference to work for one particular candidate or organization, this should be honored. If a student has access to a car, this should be noted. The volunteer registration form might be set up in the following manner:

Student Volunteer Registration List

Name
Address
Telephone
Preference: Yes ___ No ___

If Yes _____

Access to car: Yes ___ No ___

Hours per week available _____

Registration forms should be tabulated and students should be matched with their preference and work with a candidate or an organization for the duration of the campaign.

Operating Procedure

FIRST Obtain list from the Contact Committee.

SECOND Assign one person per organization to be liason.

THIRD Make posters advertising for volunteers; print registration forms.

FOURTH Compile list of volunteers and coordinate with requests.

Communication Committee

This committee should be the largest because of its numerous responsibilities:

-- to compile candidate information folders
-- to maintain an up-to-date chart on candidates and their position on major issues
-- to keep a list of candidates and political organizations interested in student volunteers

Information Folders

The candidate information folders should be filed in the center alphabetically and contain in concise form the candidate's:

-- party affiliation
-- previous government experience (elective/appointive)
-- employment record
-- past views and policies
-- present views and policies

The information for the files can be obtained directly from the candidate or his headquarters, or if personal contact is not possible, from newspapers. Organization and compilation of the information can be expedited by using the Candidate Questionnaire and the Election Profile. (See Appendix I and II)

Chart

The committee should maintain a chart with all listed candidates. The chart should be prepared in conjunction with the Issue Analysis Center so that candidates' views on issues can be

recorded. It is important to make the bulletin board visually attractive and eye catching!

Weekly Reports or Poll

On the basis of data compiled and updated, students should write and distribute a weekly report on the progress of the campaign. The information chairman must insure that the information is factual, objective and unbiased. Some centers may prefer to conduct and publish weekly straw polls throughout the progress of the election. The results of the polls may be shown graphically on the board.

Operating Procedure

FIRST — Obtain list of candidates and offices from Contact Committee.

SECOND — Develop and keep up-to-date candidate information folders.

THIRD — Design bulletin board listing all candidates and views on major topics.

FOURTH — Compile and distribute weekly report or poll on campaign.

ISSUE ANALYSIS CENTER

Basically, the Issue Analysis Center operates around a bulletin board. Its function is to provide information on how issues evolve during the course of the campaign through the use of newspaper clippings and campaign literature. By analyzing articles and literature, students increase their abilities to reason objectively and develop an insight into the pragmatic operations of electioneering.

LOCATION

It is preferable to place the Issue Analysis Center in a classroom; a social studies class could be responsible for operating it. In any event, the Center should be operated in conjunction with an Election Information Center and can share space. It is necessary to have sufficient room for students to examine and discuss issue priorities.

COMPOSITION

Once a site is selected, the board can be organized with articles mounted according to the following categories:

Potential Issues	International	National	Local	State
Issues				
Effect On Campaign	How does this affect the candidate's position?			

A table or row of desks should be placed under the bulletin board for cardboard boxes and file folders which will be used for storing back clippings.

Three student committees should be formed to coordinate the bulletin board composition by supplying up-to-date newspaper clippings; International articles, National articles, and State and local articles.

Some recommended sources for articles are:

A. New York Times (International, National, State)
B. Area Daily Paper (State, Local)
C. Weekly Local Paper (State, Local)
D. Weekly News Magazines (Time, Newsweek)

At the beginning of each day the new clippings should be arranged and should be placed in the proper location on the board. For future reference, place old clippings in the file folders labeled by subject (war, taxes, ecology, etc.).

A quick glance at the board will indicate that issues and articles are further categorized in terms of potential issues, issues, and effect on campaign. Thus, before students will be able to operate the board, they must learn to differentiate between the different types of articles.

CLASSIFICATION OF ARTICLES

A POTENTIAL ISSUE includes policy statements or press releases from candidates or organizations, editorials, political columnists, and any accusations made concerning the campaign.

An ISSUE includes subjects which have become controversial and are presently being debated.

The EFFECT ON THE CAMPAIGN is the manner in which the candidate reacts to issue development. This can be measured in terms of campaign tactics and strategy alteration.

To decide whether something is an issue or potential issue, determine the objectivity of its source. A newspaper supporting a candidate may emphasize something which is beneficial to the candidate but not really an issue, or may be an issue created by the MEDIA rather than the candidate.

To decide whether a newspaper is 'slanting' the news, use the following procedures:

1. Check the editorial page for acknowledged bias (editorial support or comment).
2. Compare the number of feature stories concerning different candidates, and the intensity of these stories.
3. Contrast the placement of stories and the use of adjectives in regular news stories covering the campaigns.

For example, if candidate A's "exciting" speech appears on page one three times a week, and candidate B's "boring" remarks are hidden on page 13, it would indicate a clear preferential bias of the newspaper towards candidate A. (See IPLE booklet, Subtle Bias of the Media for more detailed presentation).

At the outset, students should identify and list the issues they believe will be most significant in the campaign. It will be important to compare this initial list with the issues which emerge as the campaign progresses. The students may even discover "non-issues": those general subjects which candidates may talk about but about which there is no real debate (e.g. clean air).

ACTIVITIES

The maintenance of the bulletin board must be supplemented by a series of classroom and extra curricular activities including:

Independent studies - Students can receive credit for doing research and writing papers or making oral presentations. Some topics for consideration:

1. Follow the development of an issue.
2. Compare and contrast the treatment of the same issue in several newspapers or media magazines. Note length of the articles, choice of words and pictures.
3. Compare the Democratic and Republican party platforms.
4. Collect and analyze political cartoons in relation to campaign issues.
5. Compare the editorials and the newspapers' stated preference on candidate to the manner of reporting candidate news. Are some candidates receiving preferential treatment?

Discussion panels - Students might examine and discuss the significance of various campaign issues at a school wide assembly. Presentations might also be made to local civic groups such as the Kiwanis, Junior Womens Club and Jaycees. This would directly involve the students in the community and provide citizens with pertinent election information.

Testing - A pre-test and a post-test of student views on the most important campaign issues and candidates. The structure of the test should help students to see if they have understood campaign strategy.

Survey/Polls - Students can use community research techniques to conduct a single poll or a series of polls on community and/or student preference on candidate and issues. These polls should then be compared with the election results as part of the post election analysis. (See Community Research Techniques IPLE booklet, for more detailed discussion.)

APPENDIX I

CANDIDATE QUESTIONNAIRE

Name _____ Party Affiliation _____

Address _____

Telephone _____

Occupation _____ Age _____

Education _____

Present Employment _____

Marital Status _____

Spouse's Name _____

Dependents' names and ages: _____

_____

_____

_____

Qualifications for prospective office:

_____

_____

_____

Motivation for seeking position:

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Reaction to following questions and/or issues:

Government _____

Education _____

Environment _____

Taxation _____

_____

_____

_____

Student Observer use only:

Reaction to candidate was _____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

APPENDIX II

Election Profile

POSITION	CANDIDATE	ADDRESS AND TELEPHONE	PARTY	COMMENTS